ROCK HILL:

Embedding Community Policing In Neighborhoods and Officers' Careers

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The Advancing Community Policing Grant

Background

Entry-level employees in the police department are empowered to work with the community to solve problems. Officers generally spend the majority of their patrol tours assigned to only one or two of the eight city areas. Being responsible for a limited geographic area allows an officer to know the people and the resources that are available to solve problems.

Rock Hill's leaders have charted a long-term strategic plan to direct growth and make the city more livable. Called Empowering the Community, the plan is a joint effort between the city's major public and private institutions. The city's Neighborhood Empowerment Team helps citizens organize neighborhood associations, access city services, and identify resources that can help them enhance the quality of life in their neighborhoods.

In addition to community policing, Rock Hill believes in community oriented government. This belief was spearheaded by the city manager. Community oriented government is also part of the police department's operating philosophy. Led by Chief David Fortson, the department has evolved from a traditional "squad" organization that was assigned community oriented policing duties to an agency that uses a departmentwide problem-solving framework.

ROCK HILL POLICE DEPARTMENT

LOCATION: City of Rock Hill, South Carolina

CHIEF: David Fortson

CONTACT: WWW.ROCKHILLPD.COM

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE CATEGORY: Organizational Culture

AMOUNT FUNDED: $100,900

SITE VISIT: February 21, 2001

DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

Rock Hill, South Carolina is located in the center of the Carolinas, 25 miles south of Charlotte, North Carolina. Rock Hill is expanding very quickly; its current population of about 50,000 is expected to grow to approximately 85,000 by 2017. The population is 65 percent white, 31 percent black, and 4 percent Hispanic.[*] The Hispanic community is the fastest growing population in the city.

The police department has 106 sworn and 45 civilian personnel, divided into the Patrol Division, the Investigative Division, and Support Services. Officers are assigned to beats in eight areas of the city, each of which is continually patrolled by one of four officers. Officers are expected to take immediate ownership of their beats as soon as assigned. The police department is not unionized.

[*] U.S. Census Bureau, 2000.

The Rock Hill Police Department proposed to advance community policing by undertaking cultural change within its organization. Members of the department needed more training to institutionalize community policing to withstand a change in leadership. The following were major goals of Rock Hill's Advancing Community Policing (ACP) grant project:

→ Develop a comprehensive reward system that provides incentives for employees who demonstrate support of the change process

→ Provide for and institutionalize organizational readiness for change

→ Institute and maintain an organizational culture that is closely linked to agency goals and objectives

→ Communicate to all employees the importance of an organizational culture that supports departmental goals, objectives, programs, and activities

→ Reduce barriers to employee participation in the cultural change process

→ Increase the value placed on education, research, and participatory management

In 1998, a needs assessment found a need for both short-term training and a long-term strategic training initiative. Initially, the grant supported instructors and overtime costs related to courses in understanding community oriented policing, problem solving, Spanish, and improving communications. Long-term training in community oriented policing, traffic, investigations, and leadership/ supervision was integrated into the department's career ladder program. Additionally, a portion of the grant money was used to purchase equipment for presentation hardware and software.

The Project

The ACP grant served as a catalyst for organizational change and for development of the career ladder program by Chief Fortson in 1998. This program created a career police officer track that provided for five promotional opportunities for all sworn officers below the rank of sergeant. This program was developed to address concerns about promotion and training opportunities and as a tool to integrate community service into the criteria for promotion.

According to Lieutenant Glenn Robinson, head of the Professional Standards Unit, "In our initial community policing efforts, we were like many other agencies, trying to change our organizational culture too far, too fast. We embraced many of the tenets of total quality management. We had work teams for everything. Unfortunately, there was not much followthrough on the accountability aspect of good working teams. What resulted was chaos. There were too many goals, too many programs, and no central direction. The intentions were good, but the results were inconsistent."

As a result, morale plummeted. Many senior managers elected to retire. Many mid-level managers left the organization for other police agencies or for the private sector. The agency lost more than 40 officers in just three years. Even replacement officers were not retained. The agency lost its identity as one of the best in the region. The staff placed the blame on the former management team, the high number of changes, and the speed with which changes were implemented.

When Chief Fortson was hired, he brought a more pragmatic management style, with a focus on slow, consistent change. Prior problems were identified, solutions were developed, and the management team was reorganized. Previous goals,

objectives, and programs were consolidated and prioritized with a focus on such issues as courtesy, civility, and customer service. Seeking national accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) became a driving force for change.

"In late 1999 and early 2000, we recognized that a staff shortage was our biggest problem," says Robinson. "We not only needed to address this retention problem, but we needed to seriously upgrade our recruiting efforts." To improve its recruiting system, the department developed working partnerships with local colleges.

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> *Lieutenant Glenn Robinson*

Major elements of Rock Hill's ACP project included:

➜ The career ladder program

➜ A neighborhood empowerment team (NET)

➜ Integrating community policing

The Career Ladder Program. A core part of the career ladder program (see exhibit 2) is mandated training for community policing. More training accompanies each promotion. In addition, each employee (civilian and sworn) must contribute a minimum of 25 hours of voluntary community service on an annual basis, as a requirement of promotion.

According to Lieutenant Robinson, "The career ladder program has been our biggest retention tool. More money, more recognition, more responsibility, and more training is a winning formula for police officers and increasing the professionalism of our staff."

The Neighborhood Empowerment Team. Voluntary community service dovetails with the community oriented government philosophy of the city of Rock Hill. The NET is a separate function of the city manager's office, with five permanent members managing the program. Each member of the management team comes from a different city agency. Three of the five members work part time, and the other two work full time. A police officer is the leader of this team and reports directly to the city manager.

The NET helps solve problems identified by the neighborhood associations. They serve as

EXHIBIT 2. ROCK HILL POLICE DEPARTMENT CAREER LADDER

All advances for sworn officers from within the department are issued based on this career ladder program.

Rank	Pay Grade	Education/Time in Service	Specialized Training	Performance Rating/Disciplinary Action	Community Service
Police Officer I (POI)	11	Entry-level position: high school diploma/GED or above	*Within 12 months of appointment:* • City of Rock Hill customer service training *Within first 2 years of employment:* • Officer survival (minimum of 24 hours) • Standardized field sobriety training • Public speaking • State-mandated requirements	Fully acceptable (2) or higher	25 hours annually
Police Officer II (POII)	12	• 2 years as a POI with a B.A./B.S. or higher • 3 years as a POI with an A.A. • 4 years as a POI without a degree • Lateral entry: 1 year as a POI with a minimum of 5 years experience	• 40 hours of community policing • 40 hours of traffic enforcement • 40 hours of investigations • State-mandated requirements	• Overall rating of fully acceptable (2) or higher • No rating of needs improvement (below an appraisal value of 2) or lower in any job dimension • No disciplinary action in excess of one written warning within the preceding 12 months	25 hours annually
Master Police Officer I (MPOI)	14	• 2 years as a POII • Lateral entry: 1 year as a POII with a minimum of 5 years experience	• 40 hours of management/supervision • 80 hours of community policing (includes 40 hours completed as a POII) • 120 hours of additional law enforcement training • State-mandated requirements	• Overall rating of fully acceptable (2) or higher and scored above the rater's average • No rating of needs improvement (below an appraisal value of 2) or lower in any job dimension • No disciplinary action in excess of one written warning within the preceding 12 months	25 hours annually
Master Police Officer II (MPOII)	15	2 years as an MPOI	• 360 hours of law enforcement training • State-mandated requirements	• Overall rating of commendable (3) or higher • No rating of needs improvement (below an appraisal value of 2) or lower in any job dimension • No disciplinary action in excess of one written warning within the preceding 12 months	25 hours annually

EXHIBIT 2. (CONTINUED)

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Rank	Pay Grade	Education/Time in Service	Specialized Training	Performance Rating/Disciplinary Action	Community Service
Senior Police Officer (SPO)	17	3 years as an MPOII	• 480 hours of law enforcement training • Within 12 months of promotion to senior police officer, must complete 36 hours of leadership development training through the City of Rock Hill Human Resources Department	• Overall rating of commendable (3) or higher • No rating of needs improvement (below an appraisal value of 2) or lower in any job dimension • No disciplinary action in excess of one written warning within the preceding 12 months	25 hours annually
Sergeant	17	2 years as a POII, MPOI, MPOII, or SPO	• 240 hours of department-sponsored or approved training • State-mandated requirements • Within 12 months of promotion to sergeant, must complete 36 hours of leadership development training through the City of Rock Hill Human Resources Department	• Overall rating of fully acceptable (2) or higher on the last two annual performance appraisals, or an overall rating of commendable (3) or higher on the last annual performance appraisal • No rating of needs improvement (below an appraisal value of 2) or lower in any job dimension • No disciplinary action in excess of one written warning within the preceding 12 months	25 hours annually
Lieutenant	17/19	• B.A./B.S. or higher, or the equivalent combination of education and experience • 2 years as an MPOII, SPO, or sergeant	• 80 hours management/supervision training • 36 hours leadership development training • State-mandated requirements • Within 12 months of promotion, must complete a department-endorsed executive development program	• Overall rating of commendable (3) or higher • No rating of needs improvement (below an appraisal value of 2) or lower in any job dimension • No disciplinary action in excess of one written warning within the preceding 12 months	25 hours annually
Captain	23	• B.A./B.S. or higher, or the equivalent combination of education and experience • 3 years as a lieutenant	• Within 12 months of promotion, must complete a department-endorsed executive development program • State-mandated requirements	• Overall rating of commendable (3) or higher • No rating of needs improvement (below an appraisal value of 2) or lower in any job dimension • No disciplinary action in excess of one written warning within the preceding 12 months	25 hours annually

facilitators to meet the needs of the community. They help organize area associations, create connections to city services, and recruit the neighborhood ambassadors who become the contacts for that specific area.

An example of how this process works is the solving of a problem with derelict vehicles within the city limits. When the NET began in 1997, citizens identified this problem as requiring immediate attention. Discussions between the neighborhoods and the city resulted in a very strong ordinance regarding the removal of derelict vehicles. Now, derelict vehicles are no longer a problem. "Today, you do not see vehicles up on cinder block in people's front yards, on the curbside, or in driveways. Our city places a value on the way our neighborhoods appear. This is just one way where we've all come together to ensure that our neighborhoods stay nice," says Lieutenant Robinson.

Integrating Community Policing. Patrol-based problem solving is integrated into the daily practice and philosophy of the department. An example of this is the Community and Youth Services Division. The Worthy Boys and Girls Camp provides a summer camp experience to more than 300 local children, including children from low-income families and high-risk environments. The police department's Community and Youth Services Division runs six one-week summer camps for these youths as an extension of the department's outreach programs that target children and young adults. Because there is no budget to run these programs, the police department organizes fundraisers throughout the year to pay for them.

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>
> *Lieutenant Robinson*

Although the camp is a summer program, the grounds are also used during the school year, in conjunction with the local school district, to host Rebound, the school district's alternative school for at-risk and disruptive students. A police officer serves on the faculty of Rebound and an officer is permanently assigned to the school. The officer teaches classes, leads activities, and serves as a security presence for students.

Department Observations

Challenges

An initial obstacle was the mindset of the senior and mid-level staff, which was that "this touchy-feely stuff might not work." However, the chief continually emphasized the need to embrace these concepts wholeheartedly.

Another initial concern was establishing a comprehensive sense of community oriented policing as a problem-solving framework. Once established, training had to focus on addressing new problems resulting from the changing demographics in the service area.

Acquiring quality training and locating resources has been difficult. Rock Hill partnered with the Carolinas Institute for Community Policing out of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department to meet many of its training needs.

To determine the success of their efforts, annual evaluation criteria are in place to measure each city employee's ability to perform community outreach. Criteria for promotion within the police department are now geared to community involvement.

Benefits

Embracing community oriented policing as a core philosophy has solved Rock Hill's biggest problem: a shortage of police officers. The department found that emphasizing the community policing philosophy and explaining to prospective employees how this philosophy is integrated into the workplace attracted more qualified applicants. Moreover, once hired, these employees are more successful and more likely to flourish. The final outcome was that 16 of 18 vacancies were filled in just 18 months, and turnover has been reduced significantly.

Lessons Learned

Rock Hill's experience with the ACP grant provided many lessons:

→ Community trust is not built overnight. It requires a real commitment to learning the community's concerns, followed by a real effort to address them.

→ Both management commitment and line-level leadership are needed to solve problems. Employees must be empowered to find solutions and implement them in a streamlined fashion. Employees must also know they will be accountable for their successes and failures and rewarded for a job well done.

→ Change must be implemented slowly and incrementally. Trying to do too much, too quickly, results in failure.

→ Investment in training is necessary. Clear outcomes and measurable benchmarks need to be established.

→ Innovation is necessary to spark the creativity in employees and the community, question the process, and evaluate the community's input.

→ Communication with citizens, colleagues, the business community, neighborhoods, and schools is crucial. The department should develop open processes that foster accountability and enhance problem solving.

Panel Commentary

With candor and some courage, Rock Hill has identified the destructive power of "too many goals, too many programs, and no central direction." Agencies that do not balance progressive philosophies with rigorous pragmatism may spend years undoing the resulting damage.

In its recovery from chaos, Rock Hill focused on a basic concept that was brilliant in its simplicity: integrate the department's standards, goals, and expectations in the leadership and promotional continuum and make each employee's advancement contingent on successfully meeting the organizational goals. At the same time, the pursuit of training, which further inculcates agency objectives while increasing employee excellence, was rewarded. The brilliance of such an approach is that it allows the agency to be both dynamic and progressive (that is, the goals of the organization against which an employee's performance is measured can grow and change). The effect is that the leadership cadre is in dynamic competition around worthy objectives, not simply advanced by memorizing a syllabus.

It is laudable that Rock Hill used CALEA and its national accreditation process and standards as building blocks to identify institutional goals and objectives. Unfortunately, many agencies regard the accreditation process as an aggravating exercise or necessary annoyance, instead of as an opportunity to assess, analyze, and clarify a department's essential mission and organizational structure.

The use of the word "voluntary" to describe Rock Hill's community service program seems to be a term of art. Although the requirement of 25 hours of community service as part of the career ladder program is commendable (and modest), it would be difficult to reproduce such a requirement in all

but a handful of agencies, and very likely impossible in agencies that have strong labor unions. In light of this reality, Rock Hill's weaving of community service activities into the fabric of its institutional identity is laudable. Although it may be difficult for many agencies to formally integrate community service into their employment practices, unlimited opportunities exist for agencies to support, encourage, recognize, and otherwise reward employees who give their time and talents back to the community.

Rock Hill's staffing crisis motivated the department to make long-term organizational changes. Although it is too soon to gauge the success of

the career ladder program, any institutional structure that purposefully invests in the professional development of its employees will create positive personal and organizational outcomes that could transcend any other difficulties.

By following "community government" principles, the city government gave the community policing initiative a tremendous boost. A synergy of overall services is a fundamental requirement for full community policing effectiveness. In Rock Hill, the police department's values of empowerment, community engagement, and professional development were aligned with the city's commitment to neighborhoods.